CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

September '77 17

President : Mr R. Bradfield, Vaughan
Treasurer : Mr L Bransgrove, 113 Lyttleton St
Secretary : Mrs R. Mills, 118 Blakeleys Rd, Castlemaine 3450

Monthly meetings are held on the second Friday of each month at the Castlemaine Education Centre (SEC Building, Mostyn St). Visitors and prospective members are invited to attend the club's sessions. Excursions are shown on the back of this newsletter.

Orchids of the Castlemaine District Number 11 by R. Mills

Caladenia patersonii. Flowers Sept-Oct.

Although named the Common Spider-orchid, this Caladenia is actually less common than the Greencomb.
Normally it is predominantly white or cream with a greenish dorsal sepal and with glandular ends to the petals and sepals, which have short reddish hairs. The broad recurved labellum has red calli and fringes and often a reddish tip. However the species is quite variable and the flower illustrated was drawn from a very beautiful deep wine-red variety concolor.
The hairy leaf is lance shaped and a single rather hairystem rises from it. Height varies from 15 - 45 cm.

The specimen illustrated was found at Taradale, but some have also been found at Muckleford.

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AN ALBINO EARLY NANCY Contributed by Merrilyn Mills

While I was walking the dog in the pine forest I found an albino Early Nancy. Instead of being purply-brown the stripe on the petals was pale yellow.

A CLUB EMBLEM.

The following emblems have been used over the past 12 months. The first 7 were drawn by Geoff Sitch and have been reduced in size photographically. Should the club adopt one as the club emblem?

Grevillea alpina (Cat's Claws or Mountain Grevillea). This is widespread in Victoria and occurs also in NSW and ACT. It is a variable plant, with many different flower forms and colours. The size of the bush varies too from a low shrub to a large erect bush. It is widespread in our district, where flower colour varies from almost all red to greenish white.

Helichrysum bracteatum (Golden everlasting) Golden Everlasting is also widespread(occurring in all States and N.T), and very variable. The local form has narrow green leaves and golden flowers. Although fairly common here it is even more conspicuous in other parts of Victoria. A form (Dargan Hill) has much larger woolly grey leaves and much larger flowers and is a common garden plant.

Caladenia dilatata (Green-comb Spider Orchid) It is probably the most common Spider Orchid in the Castlemaine district, and is easily recognised by the green combs on either side of the flower. It is widespread in Victoria and occurs in all states.

This orchid was featured in Issue no 9 of the "Castlemaine Naturalist"

Pterostylis revoluta (Autumn greenhood) The Autumn Greenhood is widespread in the dry stony hills of Victoria and is typical of the goldfields. It occurs also in NSW and Queensland.

It is perhaps an appropriate plant for a club emblem except that the Bendigo DFNC already have a Greenhood as club emblem.

Calochilus robersonii (Purplish Beard-orchid)

The Purplish Beard Orchid is widespread in Victoria and occurs in all states as well as in New Zealand.

It is widespread too in our district, and is easily recognised by the "beard".

This orchid is sometimes known as "brown-beards"

Eriostemon verrucosus
(Fairy Wax-flower, also known as Bendigo Wax-flower).

Although found in the Grampians area and also in S.A. and Tasmania, Fairy Wax - flower is a conspicuous and attractive part of the Central Goldfields bushland, whether in bud or in flower.
There are some magnificent patches of wax-flower in our district and perhaps a third common name for this plant could be "Castlemaine Wax- flower".

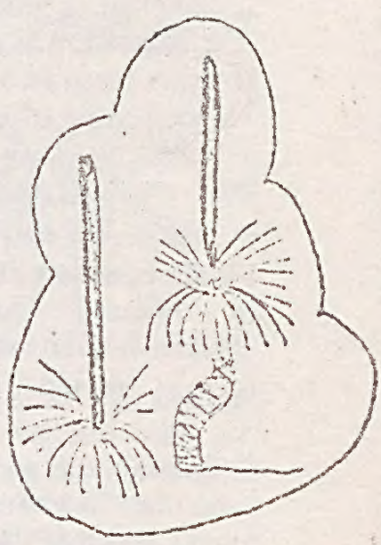
Dichopogon strictus (Chocolate lily)

This is another common plant and is a feature of local bushlands in late spring.

It is widespread elsewhere also, and is found in each of the Australian States.

Chocolate lily grows best in open situations, and has a chocolate-like orcaramel perfume. A dwarf form occurs in the district (see Cast. Nat no 5)

GRASS TREE EMBLEM



This is a copy of the emblem used by many Field Naturalists Clubs and similar organisations, such as the Society for Growing Australian Plants). We already have car-stickers using this design.

Which emblem do you think to be best?
Or should we use each in rotation? If so, perhaps we could ask our club artists to extend the range?

The "magpie-swooping season" is again at hand, so this article issued to Canberra residents may be of interest.

LET'S TALK MAGPIES

Magpies and most other native birds in the ACT are protected under the *Animals and Birds Protection Ordinance* 1966. The Department of the Capital Territory is responsible for the protection and management of magpie populations and finds that this is no easy task. Magpie attacks can cause a great deal of distress to children, and to some adults. Nevertheless many people derive pleasure from feeding and gaining the confidence of these birds and enjoy the company of this member of Canberra's varied wildlife population.

This pamphlet has been produced to inform Canberra residents about the much-maligned magpie and to indicate how humans can live amicably with these fascinating, if at times exasperating birds.

Feeds on pests

Both species of magpie, the black-backed magpie and the white-backed magpie, occur in Canberra. They prefer to nest in tall trees but will nest in a variety of other sites if trees are scarce – even on power poles in the newer suburbs. Magpies feed on a wide variety of soil animals, especially beetles and their larvae, and will eat ants, spiders, frogs, lizards and even carrion and grain when necessary.

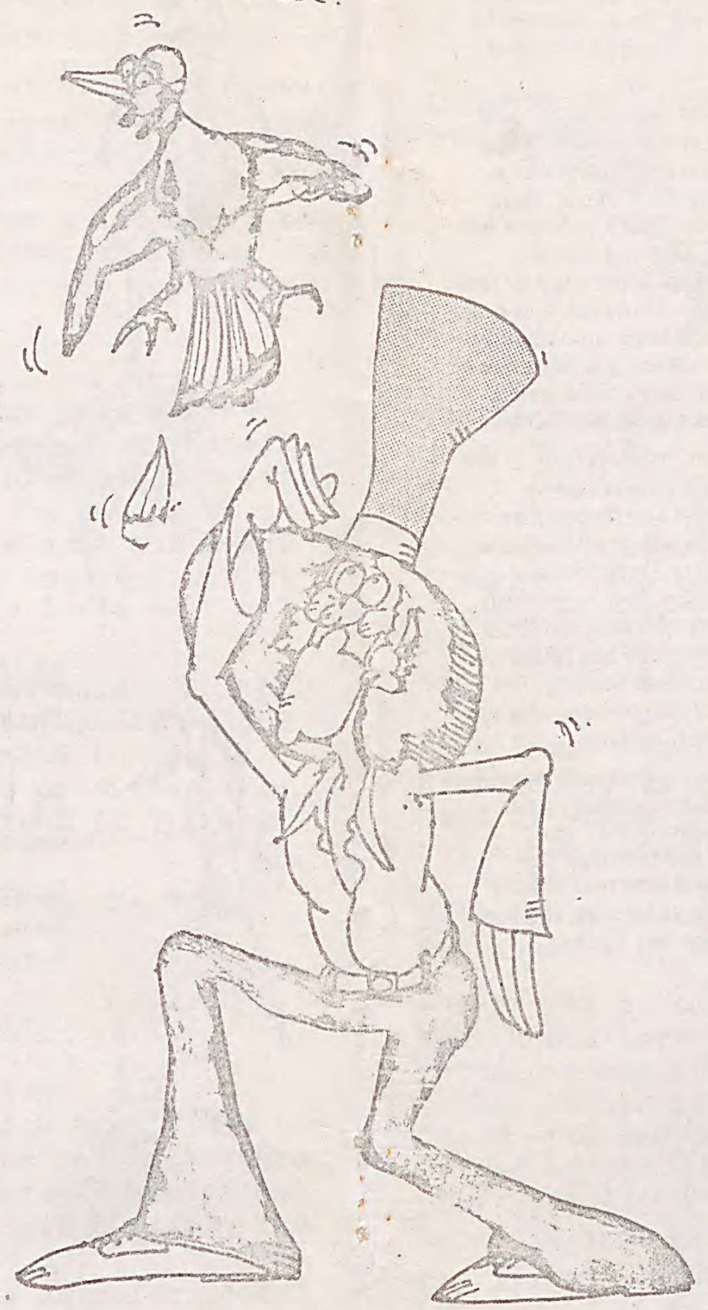
Their favourite food is the larvae of the scarab beetle which does a great deal of damage to lawns. They also help to control Christmas beetles and other pests which defoliate trees each year. The important point here is that they control insect pests in a natural way, thus reducing the need for man to use more dangerous techinques such as the application of chemical pesticides.

Tribes, flocks

Magpies form two main associations – tribes and flocks. Tribes consist of two to ten birds of both sexes which defend a territory of up to 8 ha. They vigorously defend their territory against other magpies because this is the area in which they obtain their food and rear their young.

Flocks consist of birds unable to form a tribe or gain access to a territory. They are composed of young adults and older non-territorial birds which do not breed.

Periodically birds from the flock attempt to oust birds from the tribe, but they are usually unsuccessful. A bird from a flock may join a tribe when a tribe member dies, or a new tribe may form from the flock when an existing tribe breaks down after losing several individuals.



Defence through attack

Magpies attack people because they have a strong innate drive to defend their territory, particularly at nesting time. They are protecting their nests, eggs or young from potential intruders, irrespective of whether they are other magpies, predators or people.

The reason for attacks on humans is not fully understood, but it is probably because the birds were molested by man in the past and see man as a threat. If we teach our children not to molest magpies, and refrain from doing so ourselves, we may reduce the number of attacks.

Rangers have noted that the problem of magpie attacks is not spread evenly throughout Canberra but is concentrated in particular areas. Attacks are far more frequent in newer suburbs than in older and more developed areas. This may be because the birds are not used to people, or that the people have not yet adjusted to the birds. Few attacks are reported in the older suburbs, except in some areas having large trees and parks.

Attack techniques

If people, particularly children, understand the attack techniques of the magpie a great deal of upset can be avoided.

Swooping is the most common attack method. The bird is threatening or bluffing. It is unlikely to attack if you walk confidently on, keeping an eye on it.

Beak clacking as a bird swoops overhead is another threat or bluff. If you stand your ground and glare defiantly at the bird it will usually retreat to a nearby tree.

This is certainly better than an undignified scramble to safety with the magpie in hot pursuit. Like dogs, magpies seem to sense fear and will capitalise on it by pressing an attack.

In a strike attack, a magpie swoops, hovers momentarily and then strikes. The fluttering of wings as the bird hovers is usually sufficient warning for adults and older children to duck their heads and avoid the attack. A threatening gesture with a hat, stick or umbrella will usually cause the bird to retreat.

What to do if you have a problem bird

Several avenues of action are open to you. The Department hopes, of course, that having read this brochure most residents will have gained a better understanding of magpie behaviour and a reassurance that the problem is not really as bad as it looks.

Keep in mind that the birds attack only during the nesting and rearing period, that most of the supposed attacks are really bluff and that the bird rarely has any intention of actually striking. Wearing a hat while working or playing in the backyard and garden is one of the simplest and most effective means of protection, especially for children. The hat deters much of the magpie activity and also deflects any accidental or intentional strike by the bird should this occur.

Somewhat surprisingly, adopting a confident or threatening stance towards the bird also has a strong deterrent effect. This response is most commonly used by adults but can easily be taught to children.

LET'S TALK MAGPIES

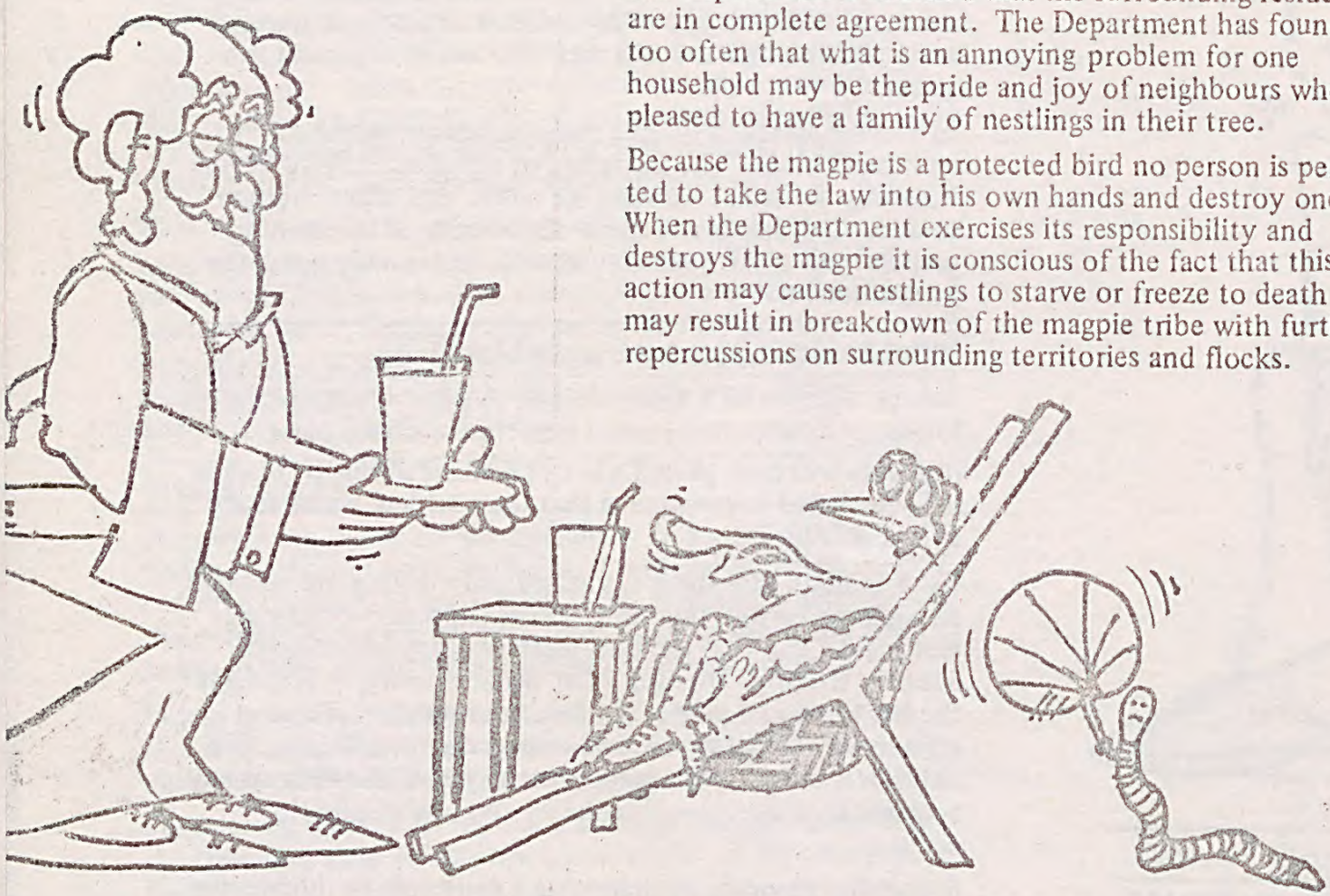
(cont.)

Feeding is by far the most effective and the most pleasant way of avoiding attack problems. Birds fed regularly with household scraps, particularly bread and meat, soon get to know you and will accept you without fear right through the breeding season.

If you find that none of these solutions are sufficient and you cannot tolerate severe attacks, you can contact the Department on 46 2308 and have the complaint investigated by a ranger from the Conservation and Agriculture Branch. If the ranger finds that you do have a problem he may decide to remove the bird or the nest and where necessary, destroy eggs or nestlings. This commonly deters the magpie from its attacking activities. However, it is not uncommon for the magpie to start rebuilding immediately and the problem starts all over again. Often it is better to learn to live with the problem bird for six to eight weeks until the chicks are learning to fly and the problem ceases.

Birds will be destroyed by departmental rangers only in the most extreme circumstances and only where it can be shown that all other tactics have failed. The Department is reluctant to have its rangers involved in a dispute between neighbours. Therefore, where it appears likely that the bird has to be killed, this action will be undertaken only when the Department is satisfied that the surrounding residents are in complete agreement. The Department has found all too often that what is an annoying problem for one household may be the pride and joy of neighbours who are pleased to have a family of nestlings in their tree.

Because the magpie is a protected bird no person is permitted to take the law into his own hands and destroy one. When the Department exercises its responsibility and destroys the magpie it is conscious of the fact that this action may cause nestlings to starve or freeze to death or may result in breakdown of the magpie tribe with further repercussions on surrounding territories and flocks.



Department of the Capital Territory

Meet The Birds in Your Garden No 5 of a series by Ray Wallace

THE YELLOW TAILED THORNBILL.

Half a dozen golden sovereigns flickering up from the grass is the first impression one gets on first aquaintance with the Yellow-tailed Thornbill, bright yellow contrasting vividly against the green background. Only a tiny sprite measuring 12 cm, he is hard to overlook because of his canary yellow rump, his upper livery is olive-brown, with the forehead darker, spotted white also sporting a whitish line over the eye, the underparts are pale greyish-white.

Known to bush people as the Tomtit, the Yellow-tailed Thornbill is a bird of the open forest and partly cleared lands. He is a regular visitor to gardens and often on a cold grey winters day my thoughts have been warmed upon going out into the garden and seeing a small winter flock of yellow-tails rise from the grass and flitter into the cover of any bush which is compact and dense. Melaleuca microphylla is a particular favourite.

A pair once nested in my garden, situating their unusual nursery in a large Grevillea which has rather pointed tri-lobed leaves. The nest proper is a domed structure with a narrow side entrance, composed of dried grasses, plant stalks, wool, cobwebs, spiders' eggsacs and other materials matted together. On top of the main construction is built a dummy nest, the function of which is still unexplained, although a number of theories have been advanced to explain this, yet another of Nature's wonders.

The pretty little Yellow-tailed Thornbill is entirely insectivorous and should have the red carpet rolled out for him if he finds your garden attractive enough to pay a visit. Sprays are not needed, Mother Nature if we let her, will keep the insect population in check with her feathered workers. The Yellow-tailed Thornbill is one of the most diligent of all her working army. A pleasure to play host to, the Yellow-tail is attractive, useful and friendly, he is welcome to my garden anytime he chooses to come.

(Reprinted from Bendigo Society for Growing Australian Plants Newsletter)

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URANUS-A PLANET WITH RINGS The rewriting of astonomy books continues with the discovery of rings around the planet Uranus. The rings were discovered this year; a space craft has now been sent to investigate this more closely.

CLUB PROGRAM

September Meeting Frid Sept 9
Speaker: Mr G. Douglas, Pres Macedon Ranges Preservation Society.
Subject: Land Use Planning & the Environmemnt.

October Meeting Fri Oct 14
Members night. Members are asked to contribute items.

November Meeting Fri Nov 11
Film night.

Next Committee Meeting

Thurs Sept 22, at 8 p.m at the Education Centre.

TREASURERS REPORT $70.00 cr.

LOCAL ISSUES
Should we, as a club, take more interest in local environmental issues? A discussion topic for this meeting?

EXCURSIONS

Saturday Sept 10 Muckleford
Leave Education Centre at 1.30

Saturday Sept 24 Ocean Grove Sanctuary. Leave Ed. Centre at 8 a.m or meet at the sanctuary at 10.00 a.m. See August Castlemaine Naturalist for a map.
Leader is Mr Bransgrove.

Oct 8-9 Grampians Camp-out
See Mr Sitch for details.

Oct 1-2 Brisbane Ranges
W.V.F.N.C.A. camp-out at the Brisbane Ranges

Sunday October 16 Rheola
Bus trip with Historical Society.
Leader: Mr Bradfield.

Sunday Nov 6 Mt Beckworth
Joint excursion with Creswick FNC.

April 22-23 Vaughan/Castlemaine
WVFNCA camp-out.

THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

The objectives of the Victorian National Parks Association are directed to the creation of more and larger National Parks for Victoria, and to have included as National Park those areas of the State which contain unique flora and fauna or scenic or historical values. This year the association is celebrating its 25th anniversary. To enable it to continue effectively it needs to extend its membership. Subscription rates for the year ending 30th June, 1978 are

Ordinary member (Country, 100 km of Melbourne Town Hall)	$4.50
Joint member (Husband and Wife)	$7.50
Junior member (under 17 years)	$2.00

All members receive the quarterly "VNPA Journal". (Our club has some copies of this in the club library)

Further enquiries, or applications for membership should be directed to theVictorian National Parks Association, 324 William Street, Melbourne, 3000.

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News-letter ed: E. Perkins.